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WHAT ONE SOCIETY DID THAT COULD NOT OBTAIN A SPEAKER.....

Literature Department of the
Board of Home Missions and
the Woman's Executive Committee
of the Presbyterian Church,
156 Fifth Ave., New York City

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What One Society Did That Could Not Obtain a Speaker.

'TWAS bad enough, no doubt about it, and when the committee met at the summons of the President of the Society, Mrs. Beach, it was not surprising that they came with anxious hearts and faces.

"Oh, the irony of fate!" exclaimed sprightly little Mrs. Mortimer, with a most lugubrious expression on her piquante face. "That it should have happened just now, of all times. It's enough to turn one's hair white with dismay. What *are* we to do?"

"'What,' true enough, with the meeting only a week off—the meeting of all the year; and our announcement made and programme published," and Mrs. Brooks glanced anxiously from one to another as if seeking some solution to the trying question. "It looks to me very much as if we might have to give it up, there are—"

"Oh, never, never!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, starting impulsively forward. "Perish the thought. I believe I know how General Dix felt when he said, 'If any man hauls down the American flag shoot him on the spot.' Let's keep our colors flying, even if they do droop a little."

"But where's the wind to float them coming from?" asked Mrs. Willis, timidly.

"From heaven, it is to be hoped, but through ourselves as a medium, I suppose," said Mrs. Platt, the practical. "It is very evident that our work has all to be done over again, more's the pity."

"Yes," said Mrs. Beach, in her quiet way, "our plans seem hopelessly disarranged, and an emergency that we have to meet promptly is upon us. We expected so much from this last meeting of the season, such inspiration for the summer, and such a new impetus for our next year's work, that it is, indeed, very hard to be so disappointed. Miss Fortescue is such a delightful speaker, so pleasing and popular, that it will be quite impossible to fill her place at this late hour. Feeling, however, that every moment was precious, as soon as her letter came I took the liberty of writing to Secretary Ford, hearing that he was in the vicinity, asking if it would not be possible for him to be with us at that time. You know he is very acceptable, and I hope he may be able to come."

"I do hope he may, although I did want a woman, and he won't begin to 'draw' the way she would have done. It's quite too bad, for I'm sure it is numbers we want this time about as much as anything else, after that splendid meeting we had with our interesting Foreign topic. What is the reason that we do not stir up the same enthusiasm when we have a Home field to discuss," asked Miss Fuller, in her decided fashion.

"Oh, the matter is not with us, but with our subject," said Mrs. Platt. "'India's coral strand' and 'Greenland's icy mountains' are a great deal more interesting to many people than our poor Indians or commonplace negroes, and foreign shores have a certain glamour that does not pertain to our prosaic frontiers. It has always seemed much easier to arouse enthusiasm in Foreign than in Home Mission work."

"There ought to be enough for both, and we must have a good deal more of it if our work is not to come to a dead standstill," added Mrs. Brooks, with an unconscious sigh. "What a pity that the meeting we organized for this very purpose should seem likely to go to pieces."

"As it certainly will, if we do not take hold of it in a very efficient manner," said Mrs. Mortimer, in a business like way. "With Miss Fortescue suddenly ill and unable to come; Dr. Burton called away by the acci-

dent to his son, and the much lauded quartette quite broken up by that ill-timed wrangle, we have little left of our greatly admired programme. Taking speakers, popular pastors, and fashionable quartettes are not very dependable after all, it seems, and here we are, when it is quite too late to do anything satisfactory, hopelessly in the lurch. Perhaps it is intended for a lesson, though. Who knows but that we were expecting too much?"

"Very likely, and if so, I suppose we must learn the lesson and profit by it—in the future," said Miss Fuller, "but the *now* is the question, the *now*, and suggestions are in order."

"As I have already said," remarked Mrs. Beach, "I hope for a favorable answer from Secretary Ford, and I presume that little Miss Lathrop, the returned missionary from China, who has been visiting her sister in the Indian Territory, would be quite willing to give us some account of what she saw and heard there."

"Oh, but she is too demure for anything," exclaimed Mrs. Parsons. "As poor for a speaker as she is good for a worker, and that is saying a great deal. And then I do hope we're not so poverty stricken that we have to call on our Foreign sisters to help us out of a difficulty, though I've no doubt they would be glad enough to do it."

"Then there's the music," said Mrs. Brooks, anxiously.

"I am inclined to think that we may be able to secure Miss Farley," responded Mrs. Platt. "She is expected home this week and is very obliging, you know, as well as very popular."

This information brought a ray of light, speedily dissipated, however, when it was suggested that as Dr. Burton had been called away, it would seem best to ask his assistant, Mr. Bourne, to take his place.

"Oh, the 'irony of fate' again as Mrs. Mortimer put it," said Miss Fuller, with an ominous shake of the head. "He's as good as gold, but as dry as dust when he tries to do anything in the popular line. The audience might go to sleep or vanish into thin air without his realizing it. But if it must be, it must, I suppose. It's only of a piece with all the rest. The less we expect of him, the better."

"We evidently cannot expect much of anybody or anything this time," said Mrs. Mortimer, slowly. "It isn't so easy to keep the colors flying, after all, and I shall have to admit that I am almost discouraged."

"It is not pleasant to face a failure," said Mrs. Willis, hesitatingly, "but I am wondering whether we are not in danger of thinking too much of the machinery and too little of Him from whom must come the blessing."

There was a moment's silence, and then in the low telling tones that always made a little

hush about her, Mrs. Burns, a rather new member of the Society and Committee, remarked gently:

"Mrs. Willis has voiced my thought. As she spoke I was just recalling the familiar words, 'Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is God that giveth the increase,' and questioning whether we were seeking His aid and guidance as much as we should."

"Oh, I am sure we are not," said Mrs. Mortimer, earnestly. "Do let us stop this very minute and pray, and pray, until we see a little light from somewhere," and in an instant she was on her knees, pouring out her soul in an earnest petition of childlike trust and simplicity that appealed to each burdened heart. Its words had scarcely died away before another and another rose on the wings of faith to the Giver of all Good, Mrs. Burns closing in one of the heavenly prayers that always brought strength and comfort, and recalled to more than one of them what was said of Enoch—that he "Walked with God."

As they rose from their knees the immediate how and what seemed but little nearer a practical solution, but somehow the sunshine had fallen athwart the shady place and in its glad glow things had quite brightened up. There was some further discussion; two or three points were decided upon; another meeting of the Committee was appointed, and they parted in a much happier frame of mind than

they had met, although prospects were still pretty uncertain, and the anticipated "great success" a decided improbability.

But it's not the easiest thing in the world to abide permanently on the mount, and when they met again and it was learned that the little Foreign missionary, Miss Lathrop, would be obliged to leave a day or two before the meeting; that the sweet singer, Miss Farley, would not arrive until a day or two after it, and that even the obliging Secretary was so situated that an imperative "no" had to be said, there was a sudden relapse into anxiety and discouragement, quite suggestive of sackcloth and ashes. The day itself was "dark and dreary." Heavy clouds hung low, making the little room very gloomy; "just as we feel," said Mrs. Brooks. An occasional flash of lightning was followed by rolling thunder; a dreary, sighing wind sounded ominous, and half afraid, the timorous women drew closer together and talked in low, anxious tones while listening for the first drops of the heavy rain that was surely coming.

The emergency at its very worst was indeed upon them, their urgent efforts and earnest prayers alike seemed barren of results, and for a few minutes the abandonment of the meeting altogether was seriously considered. But better counsels prevailed, and in the midst of the really terrific storm which soon raged about them, they committed their

ways more than ever to Him who rules in the world of mind as in that of matter, and plead their cause as if they could not be denied.

As the violence of the storm died away and the little room grew brighter, the practical ways and means were again considered. One possibility after another was discussed, one suggestion after another accepted or rejected, until at last a simple plan was outlined which met the approval of all. And then, just as a brilliant glow of sunshine lit up the windows, there were renewed prayers for guidance—such prayers as are possible only when burdened hearts realize to the full the utter insufficiency of human help.

"Oh, a rainbow!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, as they gathered at the door. "A rainbow! It is for *us!* A promise! I believe it will be all right."

"And on that great bank of threatening clouds, we see the edge of the 'silver lining.'" added Mrs. Persons, enthusiastically. "How perfectly beautiful! I am sure we ought to consider it a good omen."

"We will," said Mrs. Beach. "Man's extremity is often God's opportunity, you know. I believe we are being led by Him and that all in the end work for good."

"I believe it too," echoed Mrs. Brooks, "and that He is testing our ability and willingness to serve Him in His own way. None of you know what it cost me to promise that

I would give publicly that little account of my visit to our schools among the Mountain Whites," she added, in a trembling voice.

"But we all know that you will do it beautifully," replied Mrs. Platt, reassuringly, "and it will interest everybody, as will that pathetic letter from our dear old Indian missionary, especially when Mrs. Burns reads it in those wonderful contralto tones of hers:

"I sympathize with Mrs. Brooks," said Mrs. Mortimer, with a significant shrug of her shoulders. "Who knows, though, but that, after all, our 'home talent' may prove equal to the occasion, and that this bitter upset of all our plans may really turn out to be 'a blessing in disguise.'"

"Do let's hope so," said Miss Fuller, a little despondently, "although I must say that I think the disguise is pretty complete. But it won't do to imagine blessings, or pin our faith to rainbows, silver linings or omens, much as we might like to, so we must be up and doing to the best of our ability, and get things into good working order as speedily as possible. What's the old proverb about the gods helping those who help themselves? A pretty good one, I think, and 'a word to the wise,' etc., you know."

* * * * *

It was over, and with genuine surprise and unspeakable gratitude the much tried and

tested Committee looked back upon not only the best meeting of the season, but the most successful one in all their history. The evening was threatening, but the Church was crowded—who knows why?—and as fragrant and blooming with flowers and plants as it was bright and attractive with flags, the flags which tell such a wondrous story—and the very simple programme was carried out to the evident delight of all. The graceful introductory words of the President set off to good advantage the brief but racy history of the Society, recounted in her own very original, sparkling way by the inimitable Secretary, Miss Fuller, which closed with a forceful statement of how they were trying to meet some of the terrible conditions confronting us as a nation, and an eager appeal for the help of that large number of women to whom home mission work is but a name.

Mrs. Brooks' short, well told story of the Mountain Whites and her recent visit among them, with picturesque touches here and there of their past, about which people in general know so little, was received with very evident interest, and few eyes were dry as Mrs. Burns, "in those wonderful tones of hers," read the touching entreaty of the old Indian missionary for his people. A stalwart young negro, studying for the ministry—he was a Methodist, but what of it, seeing that with Him there is neither Barbarian nor Scy-

thian, bond nor free—told in a few words something of what a Christian education was doing for the young of his race; and a young woman, supported by the Church, stated in a concise, straight forward way, the urgent need of unceasing work among the foreigners in our great cities.

Between some of these short, simple talks, for they were nothing more, Mrs. Mortimer, much against her will and only from the strongest sense of duty, fulfilled her promise to sing in public one of the sweet Scotch songs with which she was accustomed to charm her friends in private, and dear little ten year old Ernest Willis sang "Angels Ever Bright and Fair, Take, Oh Take Me, to your Care," until it seemed as if the heavenly denizens could not resist the pleading call, and that his bright presences would vanish with the song.

Then, too, there was a genuine innovation, in the shape of the opportunity given for brief prayers and two minute talks, which proved one of the most interesting experiences of the evening. The responses were prompt, not a minute was lost, and real enthusiasm was evoked when an old resident who happened to be back in his childhood's home for a few days, reminded them in touching words that the beautiful church in which they were at that moment, was the child of Home Missions, a fact that many of them did not know, or had not realized.

So far the meeting had been an unqualified success; Mrs. Beach had proved an ideal presiding officer, there had not been a slip anywhere, each exercise had been refreshingly brief, and it was still early when the time came for the closing and rather anxiously expected words of the mild mannered little assistant pastor, Mr. Bourne. Such a substitute for the eloquent Dr. Burton! Would he undo all that had gone before? turn success into defeat? The questioning eyes of the Committee scanned him eagerly as he came forward, and there was an indefinable something in the air, as three or four persons from different directions went out, suggesting the thought whether it would not have been better to close right then and there.

In his usual quiet, unobjectionable, but by no means attractive manner, he said a few words expressive of his pleasure in being there and purpose of detaining them but a few moments, and then, begging pardon for a bit of personality, spoke with tender feeling of his devotion to the Country for which his dearly loved father and only brother had laid down their lives. It was beautifully done; there was instant attention, a sudden silence that could almost be felt, a strained listening to catch each word, and a conscious sympathy that acted like magic upon the speaker. A moment or two, and he seemed almost transformed before them; the slight figure took on

new dignity, the weak voice new strength, and, quite carried out of himself, the usually rather formal, embarrassed manner gave way to entire self-unconsciousness and vigorous life and action. As if inspired, he drew a vivid picture of the country's progress and prosperity; stated in thrilling words some of its desperate dangers and imminent needs; made a burning appeal for the right kind of Christian patriotism, and closed with a ringing plea for individual interest and moral and financial support in the great work the women were doing.

There was a sort of surprised silence as he turned to his seat and the choir rose for the closing anthem, and then—something unheard of on such an occasion—a sudden, enthusiastic, long continued burst of applause. As it finally died away, a young business man, Mr. Drake, by no means well known for his generosity, begged the privilege of a few words, and suggested the collection which it had not been intended to take, pledging a handsome sum himself, in token of his appreciation of "such a wonderful meeting." The proposition was promptly seconded and cheered, the baskets were passed, and the large audience rose and joined in a glad hymn of praise, which voiced far more satisfactorily than the proposed carefully prepared anthem by the choir could have done, the deep feeling which pervaded all hearts.

It was good to be there, hard to separate, and grateful expressions, fraternal greetings and warm handshakings were but the outward manifestation of the inward satisfaction. All who had taken part came in for congratulations, Mr. Bourne to the gratification of each, carrying off the lion's share in his own modest fashion, and new friends and paying members, in surprising numbers, rallied to the support of the Society.

"Sure enuff, de spirit ob de Lord was wid de deah wimmin," soliloquized the old colored janitor as he went his rounds before closing the church for the night. "'Pears to me I neber heerd ob sich a meetin'." A sentiment evidently shared by young Mr. Drake, who, as he walked home, congratulated himself that he had attended it—why, he hardly knew—resolving that if that was what the Women's Home Mission Society was doing, it was high time it should have his support and practical aid, as that of a man who loved his country. "Such a meeting as it was!" he repeated, half aloud.

Such a meeting, too, as the rejoicing Committee had the next day, as they counted the undreamed of sum that had been added to their slender treasury, and lingered gratefully over the happy outcome of all their tribulations. Truly, the dark cloud that hung so threateningly over them had had its "silver lining;" their extremity had indeed been

God's opportunity, and one and all recognized that they had received a direct answer to prayer. *He* had directed their plans, blessed their simple efforts, inspired Mr. Bourne's golden words, and sent them an audience of "cheerful givers."

"And taught us our dependence upon Him as we have never felt it before," remarked Mrs. Beach, feelingly.

"And that He will help us to help ourselves, if we are willing to be used as He would use us," said Mrs. Brooks, who still almost shivered as she thought of her effort the evening before.

"And to be ready to consecrate our talents, whatever they may be, to His service when needed," added Mrs. Mortimer.

"Yes, and that with His blessing we can accomplish all things," said Mrs. Platt. "He loves to be entreated for that blessing, and what an assurance this experience gives us of the efficacy of prayer."

"He loves also to be thanked," said Mrs. Burns, after commenting tenderly upon Mrs. Platt's suggestive words, "and who so indebted as we?"

The traveler standing at sunset on the terrace at Berne looking out upon the Oberland, sees that marvelous afterglow—Nachglühen,—produced by the rays of the sunken sun reflected from the snow capped mountain range. It has a glory all its own, born of the moun-

tains and the sun; a work of nature beyond the reach of art to successfully imitate, and worth a journey to Switzerland to see.

There is, too, a spiritual afterglow, an illumination of the human heart, often of the human face, wrought by the Holy Spirit; a restoration of the lost image of God originally impressed upon man by his Creator. When this little group of Christian women separated, after Mrs. Burns' simple, sincere prayer of thankfulness and consecration, in which all had silently and heartily joined, their hearts rejoiced and their faces shown in this heavenly afterglow; an effect possible only when the Divine Sun of Righteousness sheds His beams upon receptive human souls.

MRS. CAROLINE STARR MORGAN.

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